

An interview with John Kent Lamb

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JOHN KENT LAMB

An Interview Conducted by
Frances Hughes
April 21, 1980

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NARRATOR DATA SHEET

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DATE

Name of narrator: John Kent LambAddress: 624 Deming St., Terre Haute, IN Phone: Birthdate: 1902 Birthplace: Date of death: 06/04/80Length of residence in Terre Haute: Education: Indiana State Training School high school;attended Indiana State University.Occupational history: Payroll clerk; executive vice presidentof Terre Haute Area Chamber of Commerce, 1952-1967; memberof Terre Haute Fire Department.Special interests, activities, etc. Elks Club; Rotary Club;active in Alcoholics Anonymous. For additional information,see Terre Haute and Her People of Progress, 1970, 134-135.(Vigo County Public Library Special Collections)Major subject(s) of interview: Prohibition, Roaring Twenties,social customs, Alcoholics AnonymousNo. of tapes: 1 Length of interview: 61 min.Terms of legal agreement:

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04/21 & 28/80		Lamb's residence	Frances Hughes

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JOHN KENT LAMB

Tape 1

April 21, 1980

Mr. Lamb's Home -- 624 Deming Street, Terre Haute, Indiana

Interviewer: Frances Hughes

Transcriber: Jane Pursell

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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FH: This is Frances Hughes. Today I am interviewing John Kent Lamb. Mr. Lamb has emphysema and is under oxygen as this interview is being conducted. The date is April 21, 1980. We are sitting in the living room of John's home at 624 Deming Street, Terre Haute, Indiana.

John, we want to talk about the Prohibition days and the Roaring Twenties with you because that was when you and I were really getting around. As a man about town in those days we feel you have a lot to contribute to this program. Now, would you like to start telling us about ...

LAMB: Well, in the first place, I want to welcome you to our home. Delighted to have you here. I can share with you some memories. There are several matters dealing with the Prohibition days that my memory will not be so certain on. Only those maybe a little bit educated in this field will have the slightest idea what I mean by that remark, but, nonetheless, it is true.

It was interesting that several of the states had already adopted dry programs. I believe Indiana was one of these, so citizens of Indiana seemingly in those days were in favor of Prohibition. Of course, this was a hot political issue of the times. I recall that part of it pretty clearly.

Finally, in 1917 the Prohibition Act, which included the whole nation, of course, became an amendment to the Constitution, the 17th. Let's see -- is that right? I believe it was -- no, 18th Amendment. The Prohibition Act was prepared in 1917 and ratified in 1919. It was the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and known as -- by wide knowledge as the Volstead Act. That's what I think the formal name of it is.

Frankly, in my opinion, and I think, in that of most of the people who lived through those hectic days of the -- rule, so to speak, of the Prohibition era it was pretty tough on the whole country.

LAMB: It took just three amendments later In the 21st Amendment to the Constitution I believe it was repealed; and this repeal went into effect, again as I recall it, in the first year of the Roosevelt administration, 1932. [It was repealed December 5, 1933.] FDR had promised [in] one of the strongest planks in his run for his first election to the presidency that they were sick and tired of the Volstead Act. Finally, they eliminated it from the Constitution.

But the interim from 1918 until 1932 was certainly a hectic period in the domestic history of the United States. I suppose that no amendment all through our history There have been startling few of them really, but I don't know of any other one that met with such absolute disdain, general disdain -- except for the professional dries and the people who were dry on religious grounds with whom I have no quarrel at all. But those groups were certainly in the minority. It simply became [a] laughable, however tragic, I think, mark on our whole history of freedom of choice. One thing and another in our personal affairs was certainly interfered with. Most people, I'd say, had nothing but disdain for the law. We spent billions of dollars trying to enforce it; and it shelved, I think, the independent spirit of the American people when that type of thing is passed. So we regained a little more freedom than [after the repeal]. Of course, a lot of people look at it as licentious; but, nonetheless, drinking is here to stay. It became a rather personal problem with me. I finally had to refrain from it but not because of any legal limitations. The days here were hectic and gauche, really exciting for a young man as I was in those days long ago.

FH: How old were you then, John? Now in 1918.

LAMB: It was passed in 19 -- became effective in 1918. [It actually became effective January, 1920.] I was 16 years old and almost immediately home-brew came on the scene. "White mule" came on the scene, and how in the world we ever managed to drink "white mule" is more than I know. And incidentally -- I don't know, [but] I think importantly -- this whole area was tremendously heavy on coal mining. We had thousands of coal miners in this immediate area and our satellite towns, so to speak -- not meaning to run them down -- Clinton, Indiana; Brazil, Indiana; Sullivan, Indiana.

LAMB: All along this border between Illinois and Indiana on the Indiana side, District 11 was the coal miners. There were thousands of them. Coal miners were real fine people and effective workers, but they lived a pretty dangerous life and they certainly liked a free hand in their personal doings. I think you will find all over the United States during this era that where there was mining (which is a particularly dangerous occupation), where you find a concentration of whatever type mining it might be -- gold or silver, any of the minerals -- you would find a concentration of believers in free-living, of freedom for everybody that could keep going. So I think we had a particularly good setup here, so to speak, for the absolute ignoring of the law. Of course, we had several private societies who were for the law, and they developed in some pretty good street fights and some pretty good (laughs) battles about opinionated people. But it was all wild and a lot of fun particularly for a guy coming up 16, 17, 18, 19 years old. We had a lot of fun. Nobody would argue that, I think.

FH: But you and I were from a little better financed group than the coal miners. We had a little more money but our groups drank too.

LAMB: Yes, yes. I worked around the mines myself but I didn't work in them. In other words I was never a member of the union, but I knew coal miners by the hundreds because I worked at the Old Dixie Bee. I worked I made the rescue run to the City Mine in Sullivan when it blew up and killed something over a hundred men. Terrible thing. I worked at the Sugar Valley just across the river and the old Speed Well so I worked for Richards and Sons Coal Company as a company man. I was a payroll clerk and various other odd jobs around the mines. I was very well acquainted with them and very fond of them because they were a great outfit. All sorts of methods grew up real fast by which the practical demands of the people of this area were answered. I remember that we had Gordon Gin bottles. I don't know what in the world was in them as I recall it, but the bottles looked nice and I got my supply, and many others, from a porter in the old Terre Haute House. This will give you some idea of how long ago it was. Then it was let's see -- the old Terre Haute House was torn down in 1927, I think. That would be real close. Old Walt was a great guy and he bottled the

LAMB: gin in Gordon bottles. You might have to strike that as a plug. I don't know. It's all right, I think.

FH: How much did you pay for a bottle?

LAMB: Five dollars. I was just going to add that. That was the standard price and Walter was a great guy.

FH: Was that a quart?

LAMB: A fifth. Short quart. (Laughs) And all sorts of bootleg places grew up. Most of them really all right. I have often thought that (and this thought stays with me) about the time that we were talking about, the basement room became the social room of the home. Now nobody ever thought of going to the basement before, you know. But on the other hand, they were doing something illegal if they were making home-brew and they didn't want the neighbors to know it. I have often thought it was maybe the beginning of the development of the basement room as the social room of the home. You never thought about having somebody come in your front door and invite them down to the basement. They would have sent you to the funny farm. But it became the vogue and now there is scarcely a home that doesn't have a family room or some nice name like that. Well, I think that bootlegging started that.

FH: Didn't the home-brew sometimes blow up?

LAMB: Oh, yes, it blew up. Sure, it did. Boiled up and blew up. How we all managed to drink it I don't know and live through it I don't know, but some did -- the lucky ones, I guess.

FH: How many bootlegging places would you say there were in Terre Haute at one time?

LAMB: Heavens, Frances, I would say at least 200. A man might have been disabled or something; he would go home and start making a home-brew deal and he would invite the neighbors in. Pretty soon he saw that he might make a nice little living and that place grew up and became popular or died out, whatever. And there were road houses by the score on all sides of Terre Haute and in all the mining towns around Terre Haute, all of which were gaining importance both socially, economically and every other way. And [as]

LAMB: we've grown, they've grown. [But they] haven't grown too much because, of course, coal mining as done on individual mines like the ones I've described is just about done. There are almost no individuals that come into communities [like that] anymore.

FH: Didn't they make a show of raiding these bootlegging places every once in a while? The revenue men?

LAMB: Yes, oh, yes. I don't want to use the name of one of the associations, but it was a very strong power politically -- particularly in Indiana and, I think, particularly in West Central Indiana. You may guess. I just don't want to use the name of the outfit.

FH: But I mean the federal men came in and raided or . . .

LAMB: Oh, sure, the Feds came. Oh, sure, we looked for them every once in a while, but the . . .

FH: Wasn't it mostly a show though? Didn't they usually reopen within a week or so?

LAMB: I think it really was, yes. They just came through as a matter of routine. The federal government had financed all the efforts to shut the places down, but once the men received a tip, [they] came in and made the raid and made a business of destroying the mash and all that stuff, you know. Frankly, it should have been destroyed. It was hideous stuff to drink, just hideous. But we managed to get by on it. There was an awful lot of serious illness caused by the kind of stuff we drank.

FH: What about the gangster situation?

LAMB: Well, of course, it was just made to order for the whole fraternity of gangsters. It was just a made to order bill. And they built stills and one thing and another in the suburbs of the big cities, and it became a tremendous billion dollar business. I don't think I am overestimating that at all when I say billion dollar business in this country. And, of course, they were completely lawless. And with all that money they could buy an awful lot of authority. I mean legal authority. And there is just no question in any of our minds back in those days that the Feds were in on the

LAMB: act and the whole business was just a setup. Making show business out of what really was a bad situation.

FH: A lot of money was spent on trying to enforce the law, wasn't it? But it was just more or less of an act.

LAMB: Yes, that's right.

FH: Were there any gangsters who used to hide out here? Did Capone hang out here?

LAMB: Yes, yes. Terre Haute, oh, fifty, sixty years ago was not a bad town. I would never say it was a bad town, but they did find shelter here for some time. That is occasionally big time criminals would The heat would be on in Cook County or in Chicago, or the heat might be on somewhere else and they would drift in here. They went down to our West End which was notorious. I might as well say this: our West End was notorious from coast to coast in a rather minor way because these people came here not to be seen and heard and everything else but to not be seen in places where they might be picked up. As long as they stayed here and spent their money and did nothing wrong they were, I would say, fairly welcome down in our West End. And they didn't. Really they, those outsiders, didn't do anything detrimental to this town.

FH: When you say West End, I know what you mean by West End, but this is a red light district where there were prostitutes and saloons.

LAMB: That's right; it was wide open. Let's not kid each other about that.

FH: And what were the famous red light houses of prostitution?

LAMB: What were the famous ones? Well, the Madam's was one.

FH: Madam Brown's?

LAMB: Yes, well, I hesitate to use names. Really I do, Frances. Yes, Madam Brown's and many, many others.

LAMB: But that area was north of Wabash and west of Third Street, all the way from Wabash Avenue and then over to the Wabash River. All the way out to the Big Four railroad was pretty ripe with bordellos and all kinds of, shall we say, illegal but fun houses (laughs). I'm honest about this town. I love it and I wouldn't deal it a bad hand any place down the line. I think it was a very humanized town. We have had some bad politics, sure. We have had bad days with the element we are talking about, sure, but who hasn't really? I am not a psalm singer by a long shot. I am just what I am and what I have been. I knew these people quite well, a lot of them. A lot of them I regard as friends as a matter of fact.

FH: Don't you think Terre Haute people more or less accepted this? Many people knew Madam Brown. Many people knew her when she went to the restaurants around here and they accepted Prohibition. They enjoyed it. (Laughs)

LAMB: Well, as a matter of fact, one of the better night spots in Terre Haute way back through the years almost as I can remember when the place was built; and I'm not going to mention it, but many people who know me will know just exactly what I am talking about -- the place and all. And some of the characters from the West End in those days had a hand in that place, and they ran a straight down the line place.

FH: You mean a local club that is still open?

LAMB: Yes, of course. Everybody in Terre Haute goes there. Oh, everybody I suppose but a few real blue nose people who wouldn't be caught dead in any place with anybody who had a record for parking on the wrong side of the street. You know, those angel faces, and I'm not in that camp.

FH: We can mention the name of the place. You mean the Rod and Gun Club?

LAMB: Yes, I'll say the Rod and Gun Club.

FH: And Eddie Gosnell had a very strict sense of values along with being a bootlegger and all, didn't he?

LAMB: Sure, Eddie was a dear friend of mine. So was Hobart. I knew their place at 13th and Haythorne before they built the Rod and Gun Club. There was no rough tough stuff in those places. They put the bounce on you right fast if you got out of line. Oh, fights once in a while, sure, for goodness sake . . .

FH: However, there was an unusual feature of that place that he did not object to. The little rooms. Could you tell about . . .

LAMB: Oh, not at all. We used to call them escape hatches. Somebody would pull on the rope; that meant something was going on. Everybody could just walk out of the side.

FH: Each little room had its own door. You could come in from the outside if you brought someone else's wife or . . .

LAMB: Yes, that was a real convenient sort of setup for people who liked to wander and there are some, thank heaven, who do like to wander.

FH: He would not let them go out on the dance floor if a man was with someone else's wife. This was his code of ethics, wasn't it? He didn't want to embarrass the man's wife.

LAMB: That's right. (Laughs) And Eddie and all the rest of them would set him straight. Another old friend out there was Newt Alexander. He was a great guy. [A] musician. He was a banjo player but he was also sort of a ramrod around there. A good drawing card. Everybody liked him.

FH: Did you go to George and Ann's?

LAMB: Oh, heavens, George and Ann's down on Canal Road.

FH: Didn't they have cock fights on Sunday afternoon in the barn?

LAMB: Yes, they did and I never saw one of them because I never appreciated the brutality of a cock fight. That wasn't my dish. But they had them, sure. That was a real nice place, real nice place.

FH: You told me once about a gangster killing a man who was here for a convention.

LAMB: That was at Frenchie's. Well, Frenchie's was on the south side of the road at North Terre Haute Parke Avenue. What's the name of that town up there? Over to the Bungalow Inn which was across the creek there at Otter Creek. Now, are you with me on that? All right. Yes, the man was a member of one of our lodges, and he had all the full regalia on. He was a visitor to Terre Haute at a convention, and he was shot on the dance floor at Frenchie's because he danced with the girl up there whom he was not supposed to dance with. That's all he did.

FH: It was a gunman's Moll, wasn't it?

LAMB: I beg pardon?

FH: Wasn't it a gunman's Moll?

LAMB: That's right. That's right. Gunman's Moll. The gunman shot him down. It was true Wild West stuff. Well, that's so long ago that I don't know . . . but it's interesting.

Now, there were the road houses. There was 13th and Haythorne. There was the place up north we were talking about -- Eddie's. There was Frenchie's road place.

FH: The Cracker Box?

LAMB: Yes, and there was . . .

FH: The Apple Club.

LAMB: Yes, the Apple Club. That was a very hoity-toity place. That was a ne⁴plus ultra of the spots, you know. Best roast beef I ever ate. Still is. Delicious. I suppose I've had dinner out there a hundred times in my life. I regarded all of those people as my friends. And they were. They cashed my checks and if it bounced, they would call me and didn't send me to jail. (Laughs)

FH: Besides selling illegal liquor and later legal liquor in many of these places, they also had gambling, didn't they?

LAMB: Yes.

FH: Wasn't there also small-time gambling up over the pool halls between Eighth and Ninth Streets?

- LAMB: I don't know. I didn't patronize that block. I don't know why I didn't get into it. Yes, I know the places you're speaking of. Yes, I would not like to comment on it because I just don't know. I don't recall ever being in any of those places.
- FH: Now, the young people who were the Country Club set drank at the Country Club and Johnny Lamb used to sit and play the piano.
- LAMB: Yes, I sat and told of their intelligence with my music. If they had as many drinks as I had at the time, they would have enjoyed it because you know nobody gave a damn about anything anyway. So we had a lot of fun.
- FH: Now, your mother was a concert pianist but you played by ear, didn't you?
- LAMB: Entirely. And she never understood how I could play anything and, of course, I didn't either. Most of the time I hardly did play anything but then it was recognizable and For a hoedown it was fun.
- FH: Now, John, did many of your friends die young because they didn't quit drinking?
- LAMB: Because what?
- FH: Because they didn't quit drinking heavily.
- LAMB: Well, yes, die young? Yes, we're talking about 45 to 50 to 55 and I would call that young, too. I suppose. The kind of drinking that we did was truly destructive. I can say that they ought to do something about a guy like me, for instance. But then here again a personal choice enters into it. If a man wants to drink himself to death, I just simply don't know what you are going to do about him. If he just absolutely refuses to see what he is doing to himself I think maybe during that terrible stage of drinking he doesn't care what he does to himself. There just seems to be no appeal to pull this guy out of it, and I just have to make a grateful nod to Alcoholics Anonymous on this thing because as much as I wanted to quit drinking, I simply couldn't. I say it is an addictive drug that has a destructive effect for some people, but other people can go ahead and drink and drink and seemingly [are okay] as long as they eat and stay on

LAMB: a good health food diet and don't just make a business of staying half drunk all of the time. In other words, drinking is a necessary part of their life. If they don't get into that syndrome, there is no reason why people can't That's the reason AA doesn't take a stand on drinking at all. It takes a stand about the man or woman who is obviously destroying himself but nobody seems able to reach.

FH: But you became active in AA and worked in it when you yourself became You're not sorry you lived during Prohibition, are you? It was a fun time.

LAMB: Yes, but I became an addict, you see, just in the very same sense that anyone becomes a morphine addict or any other kind of an addict.

FH: How long did it take you to straighten out?

LAMB: Well, let's see. This is -- I don't like to say the number of years I have been dry. Well, yes, I see no reason why in this sort of really informal atmosphere I shouldn't. I took my last drink 34 years ago.

FH: Good for you.

LAMB: I was around it

FH: Does it bother you yet?

LAMB: No, not in the least. But at the same time I am not critical of people who drink, make an ass of themselves, and have fun. Who am I to say, "Well, I deprive you of that." Baloney.

FH: Do you envy them just a little bit that they can do it?

LAMB: No, not in the least. I had it. You know, you finally do whatever it is. You finally do get fed up with yourself and the way you are living and thank God, I had a patient sponsor. Somebody who stayed with me and doesn't tell you what to do. He tells you what he does.

FH: They go see people in the night or anytime, don't they? And sit and talk to them. Did you do that a lot?

LAMB: Now? What?

FH: Sit with other people and talk to them when they had a problem?

LAMB: Oh yes, sure. Sure, I still go. If somebody wants to see me, I'll still go. Why not, why not?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

FH: Your father [John E. Lamb] was one of twelve children of Irish immigrants, wasn't he?

LAMB: That's right.

FH: Will you tell me a little about his career?

LAMB: Well, he had a successful career as a practicing attorney. But I think the "stand out" portion of his life was spent in politics. He was a leader here in . . . well, frankly, in the Midwest. I didn't inherit this yen for politics because, I think, I saw what it did to him -- not that there is anything wrong with politics, but he was very, very sincere, a lifelong Democrat who was at the same time pretty conservative. Now, this doesn't key in with the modern day Democrats. For instance, William J. Bryan was a very close friend of my father, and I remember Bryan came here on many occasions as a speaker out at Merom at the Chautauqua down there or whatever that meeting was, and I remember once that Mr. Hulman, Tony's dad [Anton Hulman], furnished the car and he and Tony and I and my father and William Jennings Bryan took a tour down to Merom for that annual, semi-annual, however many they had of them . . . and Bryan was quite a familiar figure on my front porch. This was all so long ago. I was just a little bitty kid. When my father went to -- got interested in local politics, he was elected to Congress in 1883 and served one term. Then [he] came back and was a U.S. attorney here. I am kind of lost on this.

FH: He started out as a protégé of Senator Daniel Voorhees.

LAMB: Yes, he did. He was in the law office of Dan Voorhees.

FH: Voorhees was called what?

LAMB: He was what?

FH: What was he called? Voorhees?

LAMB: He was called "Sycamore of the Wabash." Yes, but the real campaign that Dad got really active in He had been to Denver to the 1908 convention and the 1912 convention. He and Bryan decided that Woodrow Wilson was the man, and Woodrow Wilson was at the convention, I think. Woodrow Wilson was in Sea Girt, New Jersey; he was governor of New Jersey. My father and Bryan went to the Democratic convention in Baltimore that year. The man to beat was Senator Champ Clark of Missouri. Woodrow Wilson always said that Bryan and my dad were the two that swung the convention to Wilson. Wilson had to find some way, I suppose, to reward my father. He made William Jennings Bryan Secretary of State. Not many people remember that and I'm not so sure that William Jennings Bryan was a great Secretary of State, but anyway he served for a while. They were trying to find a place for my dad in the political diplomatic scene. He had the ambassadorship to Mexico sewed up. It was in the bag and there was so much revolution in Mexico that they couldn't send him.

April 28, 1980

FH: The last session that we had with Mr. Lamb was interrupted because he had a coughing spell. Mr. Lamb has emphysema and is under oxygen so we decided to continue the session at another time. It is now 2:00 p.m. April 28, 1980, Mr. Lamb's home, and we are continuing with this interview.

We want to continue to talk about first his talented and colorful family. His father John E. Lamb worked as a law clerk for Voorhees and then was his partner for 20 years. Is that right?

LAMB: I'm not sure of that. I think he tutored under Voorhees. He organized -- he and John T. Beasley -- organized the law firm of Lamb, Beasley and Sawyer 645½ Wabash Avenue. And old Judge James C. Sawyer was part of that. I don't recall that my father -- I

LAMB: think he was more of a right-hand bower to Voorhees than he was a partner. No, I can't say that he was a partner.

FH: But before he went in with Beasley, he was with Judge Joshua Jump /114 Rose Dispensary Building, northwest corner of 7th and Cherry Streets/, wasn't he?

LAMB: Yes, yes.

FH: Now at 26 years of age, as I understand, he was the youngest prosecuting attorney that Terre Haute ever had.

LAMB: As far as I know, he was.

FH: At that time. He also was interested in amateur and semiprofessional theatricals, wasn't he?

LAMB: Yes, he was.

FH: He was with the Maurice Hewitt concert company which toured small towns?

LAMB: That's right.

FH: Do you remember that he played Simon Legree in "Uncle Tom's Cabin"?

LAMB: Yes, I recall hearing about that. Family legend.

FH: And what part did your mother have in this company?

LAMB: Part of musician.

FH: Who was the manager? Do you remember who was the manager of the company?

LAMB: I think Eugene Debs. I'm not sure. Debs was in it. I know they appeared together several times.

FH: Now your mother's -- what was your mother's maiden name?

LAMB: Her name was Esther Kent.

FH: She was one of four daughters?

LAMB: She was the first of four -- first of a family of four daughters to Murray B. Kent and there was one son who died early in life.

FH: Her father was an implement dealer here, I believe?

LAMB: Yes. He was; just a second, you don't mind if I have a look, too, do you? (Looks at old newspaper clipping)

FH: Now, your maternal grandmother was quite a gal, wasn't she?

LAMB: Oh, yes, she was the champion. "A well-known veteran citizen called by death, Joseph Kent dies at St. Anthony Hospital after lingering." (Reads from clipping) That's Joseph Kent, my mother's father. He died in March of 1904 if that is interesting to you.

FH: Okay.

LAMB: Died March 8, 1904. He was -- he had lost an arm at the battle of Atlanta. I think that is interesting enough to put in there. And he died in 1904. He was a harness dealer in the downtown district of Terre Haute. Period. That's sufficient for him.

FH: Now, your maternal grandmother Mary P. Kent, your mother's mother was quite a character, wasn't she?

LAMB: Quite a what?

FH: Quite a character?

LAMB: Yes, she was a real character.

FH: Now, do you remember all of her talents besides rearing four daughters?

LAMB: Well, she did some tinting and painting, I don't know just what you would call it. She painted

FH: China painting, wasn't it?

LAMB: China, yes. China and this stuff you put on cloth. What kind of painting is that, Thelma wife of John Lamb?

FH: Hand painted on tapestry?

LAMB: Yes.

FH: Now, she did cabinetmaking?

LAMB: Yes, cabinetmaking and made it to her own liking. Her real forte was carving, wood carving -- carving of principally black walnut. And, oh, what's the other Anyway, she became so enamored with this when she went on a trip to Germany. This is the starter. She went on a trip to Germany and she wound up in the Black Forest Region which is the center of this type of artistic carving, I think in the whole world. She became so enamored of it that she asked the residents over there about it. Anything she started she did well. She was a remarkable woman. When in Germany she found out [who could teach her how to carve]. They said, "You are a stranger, of course, in Germany. You are traveling." "Well, yes." "Where are you from?" "Well, I'm from Terre Haute, Indiana." They told her this is a real coincidence. "How close are you to Cincinnati?" And she said, "Oh, a couple of hundred miles from Cincinnati." And they said, "Well, a Mr. Joseph Leiberger" or whatever, you know, "went to Cincinnati and we have his address. We would be glad to send you to him and we know that he would be glad to see you because he has very few friends in America."

Granny couldn't [wait to] get back in time, get on a train and go to Cincinnati. She took some money with her and proceeded to take lessons with this fellow for some time. She didn't even come back from her initial visit. She took lessons with him and lived at his home and worked in his shop for over two weeks and then came back and set up a shop of her own. And [she] did all her original work and there are some forty or fifty pieces of it. I have the location of almost every single one. Very little of it has gotten out of the family, and we haven't let it get out of the family.

She was also a taxidermist. [She] went hunting and one thing and another up the river banks, shooting birds and bringing them back and cleaning them up and then mounting them in her neighborhood [where she lived]. This created a lot of ferment in the neighborhood, literally, because a taxidermist is a stinky job or was in those days. You could smell the place for She used to battle with the neighbors over that. But she was a real old-time character.

FH: And you remember her?

LAMB: Oh, yes, very well. She died in about 19 . . .
oh, what, 30 something or other. Early 30's. [1933]

FH: Now, John, let's get down to you. Where did you receive your education?

LAMB: I went to Normal Training School [Indiana State University's Laboratory School, renamed University School]. My aunt Elizabeth Crawford was principal there. During my freshman year in high school -- my freshman and sophomore years -- I went to Culver Military Academy, and the third year I went to Lawrenceville, New Jersey. At that time that was a private prep school and I had ambitions to go to Princeton which it was a prep school for. I didn't get along there too well because, I guess, most of the Eastern boys were from extremely wealthy families at that school, one of those high hat places, you know. So, when I came back, I went back to school at Normal High and I finished there. Then I went to Indiana State for about a year and a half; [I] quit school and went to work in the coal mines. That's that.

FH: You went to work for the Richards Coal Company when you were sixteen.

LAMB: Yes, that's right. When I was seventeen. Seventeen.

FH: What work did you do?

LAMB: Well, I was a payroll clerk. Worked on the payroll in the office -- the old Sycamore Building. I traveled, and the miners were paid by cash in those days. We were working under the 1921 Jacksonville agreement. The miners -- I think this is important -- the miners made \$1.08 a ton. Those were the men who loaded the coal -- dug the coal, loaded it into the cars and shipped it up on top to be loaded on railroad cars. The day workers -- those were the drivers (the mule drivers), the engine motor operators, the air man (the bradish man who kept fresh air coming into the mines as best he could), and the people who worked on top [or], in other words, the ones who worked in the tippie, you know, that mined coal as well as all that. Their scale was seven dollars and a half a day. But miners were paid. Those were pretty high wages for those days.

FH: Did they live in the company town?

LAMB: Yes, I didn't live in the company homes. I traveled . . .

FH: But they did?

LAMB: Yes, there were miners' trains that left Terre Haute every morning about five o'clock on all four of our railroads -- on the Milwaukee and on the Pennsylvania -- Vandalia and on the New York Central and on what was then the Southeastern. And those traveled to coal mines which were out at Linton and out in the surrounding 30 miles, I would say. In other words, you can't imagine some of the coal miners. You may remember it but . . . It was terrific business now.

FH: But those men lived in Terre Haute who went on those trains.

LAMB: They did what?

FH: They did not live in the company towns. They lived in Terre Haute -- those miners?

LAMB: Yes, those men. There were that many men living in town. Of course, the company towns, the company houses built up around the immediate vicinity of the mine you worked in. There were such little towns like -- oh, I can't give them now. Clinton was, in effect, then, but you don't dare downgrade Clinton by talking about it as a satellite town. I'm not that stupid. They were primarily towns on which coal mining had a tremendous impact. It was their economy. The whole economy was built around coal.

FH: Clinton was much smaller then . . . though. I mean, in effect, it was a satellite town at that time.

LAMB: Oh, yes.

FH: But, now, of course, it isn't.

LAMB: It isn't at all. It is an independent town. It has its independent industries. And all that kind . . . I don't want to in any way sound as if these towns were completely dependent on Terre Haute for money because they have grown up to be nice little towns. They all are.

FH: At what age did you have your first automobile?

LAMB: Oh, I had my first car, I think, when I was nineteen. When I was eighteen. It was a Ford Model-T. I over flooded it with oil so there was lots of oil in it. It pumped oil the first day I had it, and I had to take it back to the shop and have it drained because it was fouling all the spark plugs. That's how much I knew about driving.

FH: What all did your crowd do for fun when you were younger? Did you go to the dance halls?

LAMB: Oh yes, sure.

FH: Now, what ones do you particularly remember?

LAMB: Well, we had . . . The crowd I went with occasionally had a . . . and the dance teachers -- Rose Farrington and Rudolph Duenweg /Oskar Duenweg/ and Ernestine /Myers/ and several of the dance teachers in town taught us nice little boys and girls how to dance. Then they would have tea dances once in a while.

FH: Did you go to the tea dances?

LAMB: Oh, yes. We went to the tea dances and we bootlegged our own drinks in when we were old enough and could get away with it. Then usually one or two /of us/ would get thrown out of the dance because of ungentlemanly conduct.

FH: Were you thrown out?

LAMB: Oh, yes. Once or twice, you know. That was all part of the game. It wasn't vicious. The point is it was not vicious. There weren't fights and there weren't tough people. That just didn't go.

FH: Did you go to dancing school when you were very young? Did your mother make you go to dancing school and did you have to wear white gloves?

LAMB: Oh, yes. We had to wear all kinds of things. Bow ties and all those silly things that we thought were just highly ridiculous and were ashamed to be seen in on the street as a matter of fact. It was all fine. Of course, when we got to be 16 or 17 /about 1918/, the public dance halls began opening up. There

LAMB: was Old Tokyo and we all went to that. The girls went separately and the boys went separately. And they were perfectly decently-run nice places. There was no hanky-panky when old man Weber was in the Tokyo, I'll tell you. The music was fine. Leo Baxter and his violin player -- what was his name -- a little short fellow, and Fats Miller on the drums. I never will forget Fats. He was a great friend of mine. A lot of people will smile when they hear his name. A fine guy and the music was good. The Hippodrome [theater at 8th and Ohio Streets] opened about those days and it was a great thing to get a date and go to the Hippodrome and then go to the dance halls. That's the way most of us spent our time. After the dance halls the lucky ones who had cars did what? They proceeded to go to the outlying reaches of Vigo County and sit under a tree someplace and smooch. I suppose that has been going on since time memorial -- immemorial, I mean.

FH: But the sex was not as it is today. I mean, they just smooched?

LAMB: That's all. It didn't

FH: Some of them did more.

LAMB: Well, some did more. Of course, there was some drinking which was -- is -- a danger in those situations. You know people sort of lose control, and they did fall in love, and they did have fun. This is the most natural thing that people do to start with but must be inhibited if we're ever going to have any law at all. (Laughs) And [it] was . . . I think, pretty well. I don't think the kids were a darn bit worse than [at] any other time in the whole history of the world. They'll go about as far as they can go and then according to the customs of the times they will at least try to play it.

FH: But none of them took dope?

LAMB: No. Took what?

FH: Dope.

LAMB: Oh no. I don't remember any dope at all, Frances. I really don't.

FH: What did . . .

LAMB: Pep pills and the . . . all of those things were just not thought of. The stuff we did drink was tough enough, for heaven's sake, without taking dope. And we had a sort of horror of a dope fiend. That was the term, you know. We got that, I guess, out of Chinese pictures and opium dens and all that kind of stuff that . . .

FH: Did you think of anyone who used dope as only the Chinese who smoked opium?

LAMB: I never . . . I don't think I ever knew anybody in the days we are talking about -- I don't think I knew anybody who used dope. What we would term dope. It just wasn't in yet; that's all. Now, it is in, and it's one of the big problems of the day, of course, when it is used.

FH: Did your crowd have private dances, too, that were sort of like debut parties? I'm five years younger than you. Maybe that didn't come along until my group. They would have dances at Christmas time -- private dances at the Elks and the Phoenix.

LAMB: Yes, and the fraternities would. The fraternities were well represented at the University of Indiana, for instance. They would come to Terre Haute, maybe. The Delts would have a dance or the Phi Chi's or somebody. I didn't know any of the fraternities because I didn't belong to them. But they were interesting and they were pretty decorous. They had chaperones and the chaperones stayed the evening out and fortunately went home. They didn't get in another car and chase people around the neighborhood. I remember lovers' lane. Do you remember lovers' lane incidentally?

FH: Where was lovers' lane? I remember lovers' lane.

LAMB: Well, lovers' lane extended from about Ohio to Hulman on Fruitridge Avenue. It was two laned. When you went out there, you were reasonably safe -- I mean there were enough people around. Of course, there was some danger involved in that because the hoodlums got wise to it and would raid the car, you know, and take whatever whiskey you had. There were no assaults that amounted to a great problem because the police finally started to patrol the place. Not that they wanted to really interrupt the kids but they wanted to give them some element of safety and let the hooligan world know that there were police out there. And

LAMB: there was one killing. The police did bring about one killing out there. Somebody was killed [for] attempting to assault one of the couples.

FH: But there were practically no cases of rape from lovers' lane.

LAMB: Oh, no, no. I don't remember a single one out there. The kids were essentially nice kids. They were from nice families. Of course, the girls on occasion after a dance . . . the parents knowing that they would go out to these places where all the other kids went would permit the girl to invite the young man into the house after the dance and the parents would discreetly go upstairs. I suppose they kept all the bedroom doors open so that they could hear every damn thing that was going on, but they permitted the daughter to invite the young man into the house because they felt with all good judgment that it was safer there with this young man than she would be along the roadside someplace. She wasn't threatened from both directions in other words. It was sort of silly all the way through but it wasn't a vicious age at all.

FH: Where did you go to eat in the evening? Did you go to the Flashlight?

LAMB: Well, we went to the Flashlight. That was a great spot, that Flashlight. Everybody in town went there. Bill Meirowitz ran it. He had a couple of lovely daughters, lovely family and himself. He was a great big bulky fellow. He ruled the place with an iron hand but he treated us all right as long as we stayed in line. We could come in there, mix our drinks and all if we behaved. But believe me he put the bounce on us if we got out of line, and he would bar people for so long a time. We had some real funny experiences out there.

FH: Places like that would serve set-ups and close their eyes to the bottle you brought in. Do you remember a specialty they had to eat at the Flashlight?

LAMB: A what?

FH: Something special they had to eat?

LAMB: Where?

FH: At the Flashlight.

LAMB: I'll be darned if I do right at the moment.

FH: Hot dog sandwiches fried on a grill with a great big slice of onion?

LAMB: Yes, they were good, too. That place smelled like onions so it didn't make any difference. But I had one experience out there that might, if I may insert one A fellow by the name of Spotty and I, who was a dear friend -- I'll only mention his first name -- he had a bottle of wine. We were outside standing by the billboard south of the place and Spotty said, "Hey, why don't you take a drink before you go in?" I said, "Well, okay, I will." [I] had the bottle up to my mouth taking a swig of this wine and suddenly a car turned in and flashed the lights right on me. Here I was standing there with that bottle. The two policemen who made regular calls on Bill just stuck their nose in the door and said, "Is everything all right, Bill?" They looked right at me and they had me tied to the mast, you know. This good friend of mine said, "'Well, John, that certainly was a nice drink. Thank you very much; I appreciate it.'" And he left me standing out there with that damn bottle. Well, I knew both of these cops. This is the kind of a deal it was. This bootleg business. This is a perfect example.

FH: They knew you, too?

LAMB: What?

FH: They knew you, too?

LAMB: Of course, of course. I knew them real well, and old Stan was the policeman's name. Stan made out to put on an arrest, you know, and take me downtown. And old Spotty walked off and said, "I'll see you later." Of course, I didn't know whether he would or not for heaven's sake. He might have to go down to the jail to see me, but it was funny up to that point. And one of the policemen came over and I said, "Fellows, let's finish off this bottle." So we went behind the signboard and drank the whole damn bottle. (Laughs) They went on their business, and I went in this place and joined them. Spotty thought, gee, I get along fine. They were nice fellows. I said, "I don't know what they are going to do to you next time they get you" --

LAMB: just as serious as I could be. Nobody liked a stool pigeon in those days. Now, these were minor matters, of course, but I don't think anybody really likes a stool pigeon today.

FH: Coming back to you, John. You were a fireman for how many years?

LAMB: I went on the fire department after being completely out of work. After working around the coal mines, I sold coal. I went to Chicago and went on the road selling carloads of coal to steam plants, energy plants, and all that. They didn't call them energy plants in those days. Now, wait, what was the question again, Frances? I'm sorry. What was the question again?

FH: How long were you on the fire department?

LAMB: I went on the fire department in 1934 under Mayor [Wood J.] Posey and, let's see, the pay was, I think, one hundred and fifty dollars a month. I was on it until 1952 -- eighteen years with three years off for army service in World War II.

FH: What branch of the service?

LAMB: Air force. I was a radio man. Went to Scott Field and learned my lesson well because, strange thing, what little sense of music I have [includes] a pretty sharp sense of rhythm. With radio code one of the biggest assets is the rhythmic swing of it. When they saw that I had this rhythm in the test they gave me, they sent me immediately over there and made a radio man out of me. A radio transmitter. So, I expected to go away and be shipped off on a bomber someplace 'cause that's what it was. It was a school for aerial bombers -- radio men and bombers -- and instead of that, they kept me there as an instructor. Of course, I was pretty old for the air. They kept me there till the war was over. Thelma came over. We got married and we were off to the races. So my war experience lasted about three years and was practically all spent at the Scott Field. When I came back, [I] went to the Let's see, I got back in 1945. Didn't we, Thel?

MRS. L.: Yes.

John K. Lamb funeral rites set

John Kent Lamb, 78, executive vice president of the Terre Haute Area Chamber of Commerce for 15 years and a former alcoholism counselor with the Indiana Department of Mental Health, died Thursday at his home at 624 Deming St.

Funeral services will be Saturday at 11 a.m. at the Patrick J. Ryan Funeral Home with Rev. John Chironna Jr. officiating. Burial will be in Calvary Cemetery.

Lamb served as executive vice president of the Terre Haute Area Chamber of Commerce from 1952 to 1967 — a period of extensive growth in



John K. Lamb

the area.

He was also active in Alcoholics Anonymous for many years and, in 1967, accepted a position of alcoholism counselor with the Indiana Department of Mental Health. He held that position until just a few years ago.

Lamb was also involved in various other social agencies, including the Mental Health Association of Vigo County.

Lamb was a member of the Terre Haute Fire Department for 18 years, eight as a captain. He served several years as director of Civil Defense for the city and chairman of the Chamber's fire prevention committee.

During his years of service to the community, Lamb received several honors, including Outstanding Citizens Award by the Vigo County American Legion Council, the Terre Haute Jaycee "Outstanding Citizen of the Year" award and the Award of

Merit of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Fort Harrison Chapter.

A native of Terre Haute, Lamb graduated from the former Laboratory School of Indiana State University. He attended Indiana State University.

Lamb's memberships included B.P.O. Elks No. 88, Fort Harrison Post 40 (The American Legion), Terre Haute Rotary Club and the Indiana Society of Chicago. He was a veteran of World War II.

Surviving are his wife, Thelma E.; a daughter, Mrs. Robert Hunt, Terre Haute; two sons, Kent E., Terre Haute and John S. "Pete," Stewart, Fla.; six grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Pallbearers will be Charles Baesler, Joe Benna, Dan Crowe, Bruce Falkley, Edgar Gaurer, Shelvey Kegler, Earl Maynard and Don Owens.

Visitation is scheduled at the funeral home after 5 p.m. Friday.

LAMB: In 1945. And in 1952, they came over to the fire house and asked me if I would take a job as executive vice president of Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce. Well, after picking myself up off the ground, I said, "What's it got to offer? I'm terribly honored and surprised." "Well, Speed Shideler will tell you all." Speed Shideler was there. They talked me into it, and it didn't take much because it was a nice job.

FH: How long were you there?

LAMB: Well, I was at the Chamber from 1952 until 1967.

FH: Did you retire then?

LAMB: No. I went directly I became terribly interested in alcoholism. I knew it was my prime problem in life, and I was either going to do something about it or just simply die off. I'd gotten by with it so far and was lucky and I knew it. I'd met a Bruce Falkey who was head of the newly formed alcohol division of the State of Indiana. Bruce had heard of me because of my work in AA. Bruce asked me if I would like to take on a job as alcoholism counselor here in Terre Haute, placed and working with and paid in part by the Adult and Child Guidance Clinic. That was in 1967. So I did. When the Adult and Child Guidance Clinic became a part of Katherine Hamilton Mental Health Center, I went over there under the same capacity.

FH: And you retired when?

LAMB: I retired in 1976.

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